United Nations S/PV.5845

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5845th meeting

Monday, 25 February 2008, 10.20 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Arias	(Panama)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. Lacroix
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Johansen
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

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08-25105 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Holmes to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. Holmes: I am grateful for this opportunity to brief the Council on my visit to Kenya from 8 to 10 February. I apologize if I have kept the Council waiting; I think there was a misunderstanding about the timing.

I went to Kenya in response to the post-electoral wave of violence and its devastating impact on so many ordinary Kenyans, and at the specific request of the Secretary-General. My first objective was to reaffirm the practical support of the United Nations for the people of Kenya at this extremely difficult time. As part of that, I made clear again that the full weight of the United Nations was behind the mediation process led by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. My other aims were to assess the humanitarian situation on the ground, in particular by visiting some of those most affected by the violence; to make clear to all concerned our commitment to completely impartial help for all those in need; and to make sure that the humanitarian community is fully prepared for the challenges in the coming months.

As a result of the violence, which left around 1,000 people dead, at least 300,000 people were driven from their homes — and probably many more. Over 270,000 people from six of Kenya's eight provinces remain in approximately 200 camps and sites in the Rift Valley, Nyanza, Western, Coastal and Central Provinces. An estimated 500,000 people altogether continue to require emergency assistance, with shelter, water, food and medical care. Some 12,000 Kenyan refugees in Uganda are also being looked after.

Most of the basic humanitarian needs in the camps and sites have, I believe, been reasonably met so far. The Kenya Red Cross Society has led the response, together with the relevant government services, and has played a key role in that success. The initial strategy of the United Nations humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, which responded quickly and effectively to the new and unexpected crisis, was to support and complement the national response capacity, in a country that does not lack resources or a strong civil society.

There have been many challenges to overcome. In the first chaotic weeks, displaced Kenyans moved around the country rapidly and unpredictably, driven by violence and threats of violence, but also by fear and rumours. When I was visiting camps in the Nairobi area, one site had had approximately 5,000 people just a few days earlier, but was virtually empty by the time I went to see for myself. Those concerned were moving to their tribal homelands, areas that they considered to be safer. That is a pattern for certain groups among those affected. It greatly complicates identifying and assisting all those in need, including host communities, which will be a considerable challenge for the humanitarian community in the weeks to come.

In practice, we have mapped three main types of displaced persons. The first are farmers or smallholders living in the Rift Valley, who have been driven from their land and remain in camps, churches and police stations. Second are migrant workers from western Kenya, who have been chased out of their homes by reprisal attacks. Many of them have returned, at least temporarily, to their ancestral homelands in the western provinces. Third are those living in the slums of the greater Nairobi area, who were forced out of their homes and shops during the violence and are now in

camps around Nairobi, unsure of where and how to restart their lives.

In the first category, Rift Valley Province has over three quarters of the total displaced in Kenya and was one of the worst affected by the violence. I visited five sites in Nakuru and Molo and was impressed by the cooperative efforts of the communities themselves, the Government, the Kenya Red Cross, United Nations agencies and NGOs to meet people's immediate needs.

However, it was also clear that a good deal more needs to be done to consolidate sites, build new camps, increase security and privacy, particularly for women, children and other vulnerable groups, and upgrade the quality of our assistance. It was evident from my discussions in the camps that the vast majority of these people left in panic, taking nothing with them, and are reluctant to return to their homes in the near future because of the violence they have experienced and their continuing fear. In many cases, their homes and crops had been destroyed. These people did not take the view that they had tribal homelands to return to. Many said that they wanted to be resettled elsewhere, though this poses considerable problems of both principle and practicality.

Common threads among all the displaced groups were their urgent need for safety and security, particularly for women and children, with some disturbing accounts of continuing abuses in and around camps, and the deep psychological consequences of the trauma they had been through. I heard dreadful stories of murder, of rape and of burning. The ethnic basis of much of what happened was tragically clear. Heightened ethnic awareness and fears have quickly spread through much of Kenyan society, fuelling polarization. The effects of ethnic divisions on basic government services, for example, have been dramatic in some areas because staff have quietly left or fear to go to work. Overall, it is clear that this displacement crisis will not disappear quickly even if there is a political agreement in the coming days.

All of this poses a huge challenge for the politicians, for Kenyan society and for the humanitarian community. Questions about the possible return and resettlement of internally displaced persons are particularly sensitive. There are pressures of conflicting kinds on them and on the humanitarian community. It is natural to want to see as many people as possible return home as soon as possible, but there is a lot to be done in terms of rebuilding confidence and providing reliable security before that can happen in many cases. It is vital in these circumstances to adhere strictly to the principles of impartiality, voluntariness and the need for full consultation with the internally displaced persons themselves about their future. We are reinforcing our guidelines on those points and working with the Government and the opposition on the way forward.

I emphasized those points in meetings with the Government and the opposition. Both the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of State for Special Programmes acknowledged them and expressed their gratitude for the support of the United Nations and the international humanitarian community. The Secretary-General of the Orange Democratic Movement and his humanitarian team did likewise, while emphasizing that we needed to pay as much attention to those who were not landowners and who were therefore fleeing to their homelands as to those who were likely to stay in the camps for some time.

Meanwhile, the depth and complexity of the underlying causes of the violence should not be understated; nor should the difficulty of tackling those long-standing issues. Time and political will from all sides will be needed if there is to be any hope of real success and a decent chance of averting further violent explosions in future.

Decades-long grievances over land, poverty and wide economic inequalities must be addressed in a context of strong population growth and limited availability of fertile land. Political manipulation of land and tribal issues will have to be prevented in future, including, no doubt, through constitutional and electoral reform to encourage more equitable representation of different interests in Government. There must also be accountability for those responsible for the violence, the widespread abuses of human rights and the multiple failures to protect civilians. I believe that the United Nations can and should play a vital helping role in many of those areas, including programmes to tackle provision of livelihood support, youth unemployment and reconciliation between communities, building on local initiatives.

While in Nairobi, I spoke to the donor community to remind it that the response to the international Emergency Humanitarian Response Plan, which had appealed for $42 million, was so far only

around 60 per cent, including a contribution of $7 million from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund. That level of funding response is a concern for most agencies in light of the potential for a protracted crisis. We will be revising the Response Plan in the coming weeks and I hope that donors will respond generously as the strategy behind it develops.

The regional implications of this crisis are considerable because of Kenya's long-standing role as East Africa's main transport hub. More than 80 per cent of Uganda's total imports for 2007 passed through Mombasa, as did almost all of Rwanda's exports. Burundi, the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, parts of northern Tanzania and the southern Sudan also rely on the port's facilities to a significant degree. That means that many aid and humanitarian operations in the region also rely on Mombasa and are at risk of being significantly affected by violence and disruptions.

There are secondary effects, too. For example, fuel prices in Uganda, the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi have increased by almost 50 per cent in the past six weeks. Aid agencies are having to look into alternative routes — for example, through Dar Es Salaam — as a matter of sensible contingency planning in present circumstances. But a peaceful Kenya remains by far the preferred option. There is a huge amount, therefore, at stake.

In summary, my assessment is that major humanitarian needs will have to be addressed for many months to come. We are currently looking at least a year ahead, even on the basis of a quick and effective political settlement of the immediate issues. We will strengthen our own presence further and reinforce our work alongside the Kenyan Red Cross on the basis of a strategic analysis of the needs, a clear action plan and contingency planning in case things deteriorate. As I have suggested, the United Nations will also need to look hard at how to reorient its development programmes for Kenya to reflect the need to deal with the deep underlying problems which have come to the surface.

On the other hand, if there is no quick resolution to the political crisis, the risk of a fresh surge in violence, more displacement and further polarization of society is very high. The humanitarian consequences of that could dwarf anything we have seen so far, so the responsibility of the politicians on all sides is very great, as is the need for continuing strong support from the international community, including this Council, for solutions to both the short-term political problems and the long-term questions.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Holmes for his briefing and for the detailed information he has provided.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of this subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.